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ABSTRACT

Functions of the continuing education office of a higher education institution are discussed. Continuing education offices usually offer not-for-credit courses, including personal enrichment and specialized professional courses. Summer sessions are the major activity of the office, and conferences may also be conducted by off-campus groups and professional organizations. Once an idea for a course is introduced attention is directed to questions regarding potential clientele and enrollment, course length, credit or noncredit status, and cost options. Although growth potential still exists for continuing education through degree programs for adults, competition is intense among higher education institutions, local school districts, and proprietary schools. Institutions may engage contractors in surveying the market for continuing education, publicity, program development, site selection and arrangements, program delivery, billing, and financing. Outside contractors customarily offer previously developed and prepackaged educational programs in nontraditional modes, which may emphasize independent study, weekend programs, and forms of programmed instruction. There is still resistance to continuing education at many traditional higher education institutions. (SW)

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THE TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION AND CONTINUING HIGHER EDUCATION

LEON LEVITT

It is common knowledge that, for good and sufficient reason, the higher education community in the United States is preoccupied with the growth of continuing higher education. The field is characterized by proliferation, aggressive promotion, excellence and mediocrity, and not infrequent abuses. All of it is accompanied by poking and probing by accrediting associations rewriting guidelines, cries of outrage from institutions whose "turf" has been "invaded" by marketers of "extended education," warming over by government committees and the media, resentment from school boards whose teachers' moves up salary schedules have been eased by the number and accessibility of salary "hurdle" courses, and a high level of acceptance and utilization by the consuming public.

In the institutions themselves, continuing education staff face a constant struggle to establish, protect, and maintain a visage of legitimacy, as often as not without success.

Thus, it is not judgmental to infer that most colleges and universities have a conservative posture towards continuing education In fact, typically, a policy a containment prevails. Sometimes, in some places, the policy is documented in the form of a set of statutes; equally often, it is ad hoc, subject to institutional, administration, or faculty mood, serendipitous and reactive to still another new idea or situation emanating from continuing education.

Nonetheless, prevailing practices, conditions, and philosophies have begun to crystallize, and it is of interest loosely to codify and to examine them descriptively. Following, then, is an attempt at such a codification and commentary.

Prevailing Guidelines.

Essentially, typical guidelines for continuing higher education operations set forth the following:

The continuing education office is limited in its offerings to not-for-credit programs and to programs (courses) carrying "extension" credit; viz., semester or quarter hours of credit for courses carrying duly authorized departmental designation. These courses are NOT acceptable toward degrees at the institution except by petition or other special circumstance, and they are often not designated either as graduate or undergraduate. Veterans benefits are therefore not available for such courses.

Regular undergraduate students may NOT enroll for extension credit courses except with permission of their dean; with this permission, they must pay continuing education fees in addition to their regular full-time college tuition.

Continuing education offices may NOT offer regular credit courses of the constituent colleges as "evening college" offerings nor enroll continuing education students in regularly scheduled classes at the undergraduate or graduate levels on a space available basis.[1] The policy is that persons enrolling in undergraduate courses of the constituent colleges without matriculation must go through regular admissions procedures and meet regular deadlines. The net effect is to exclude such students, a fact often acknowledged frankly.[2]

Classroom facilities are made available for continuing education offerings only after "regular" graduate and undergraduate courses have been assigned. As some institutions are extremely pressed for space, this may also be a practical consideration, which suggests the need for a separate continuing education facility. (See, for example, the University of Southern California's new Davidson Conference Center. However, such separate facilities place a very heavy financial burden on fledgling continuing education offices.) Off-campus locations are used, but begrudgingly and, often, expensively.

The continuing education director may NOT except under extraordinary circumstances enter into contractual arrangements with other institutions, whether accredited or non-accredited, for development, promotion, recruitment, financing or delivery of any type of educational programs.

The continuing education director may seek to develop new locations or publics for regular degree courses. Jurisdiction over such courses is to remain in all particulars with the college whose courses are to be offered. Usual admission and registration requirements apply. Administrative support for such offerings may be provided by the director as requested by the appropriate dean. In practice, encouragement from deans to continuing education directors to engage in such exploration or to provide administrative support seems typically sparse.

Prevailing Jurisdictions.

In spite of the boundaries placed upon them, continuing education offices operate successfully in a number of areas of responsibility including the following:

Miscellaneous courses offered not-for-credit, including personal enrichment and specialized professional courses. These are measured in terms of

Continuing Education Units (CEU's) or Contact Hours.

Miscellaneous credit courses offered with departmental approval. These may include a variety of courses for which there is an identifiable clientele, such as nurses, teachers, engineers, accountants, and attorneys. The ease with which the continuing education office obtains approval for such courses varies from institution to institution.

Summer Sessions.

Summer sessions are the major activity of the office. Summer sessions constitute a microcosm of the entire campus, as they offer courses of all the undergraduate and graduate segments of the institution. Taken as a separate but coequal university constituent, summer sessions are among its largest operations in terms of student count (not FTE's because of the shortness of the term and limits on student load). Moreover, summer sessions operate on a highly cost effective basis and generate substantial net income to the general fund of the institution, income which is counted upon in its annual budget.

Conferences Conducted by Off-campus Groups and Professional Organizations.

Good practice requires that persons attending a conference who wish to earn credit must register for it and pay the necessary fees prior to the opening of the conference, there being no retroactive credit registration. As such programs entail little or no direct expense to the institution and registrants are already paying conference fees, tuition for such courses is nominal. There being no enrollment minima, and an instructor may have as few as one, as many as 40 or 50 students, compensation is on a per capita basis.

It is important that the program not be the only source of learning input. Ideally, credit is not granted solely for conference attendance. The

instructor of record develops a syllabus which spells out supplementary reading if required, extent of conference attendance and participation required, and other credit and evaluation requirements, usually an extensive report on and analysis of the content in terms of learning outcomes. If the instructor is on the faculty of the university, then his or her department head and college dean must approve the individual's continuing education teaching overload; if the individual is part-time, upon submission of a resume and course information, approval of the department, through the department head, is secured. (Some department heads act unilaterally to approve continuing education faculty and courses carrying X designation; others submit the request for decision by the full department.)

Continuing Education: How It Works.

How does an office of continuing education select, qualify, price and mount the courses it does offer? What is the decision-making process?

As explained by Lamoureux in his recent study of continuing education practice at the University of British Columbia,

> Administrators in adult education...are confronted by administrative problems far beyond those classified as 'educational.' Adult educators usually do not have captive markets or clientele...Adult educators must allow the institution to function on a daily basis and, at the same time, grow to meet expanding community needs, not as a formally recognized educational institution, but as an addendum... Administrators are therefore placed in a position rather analogous to that of marketing manager. Both...must successfully compete for a portions of the consumer's budget. (Lamoureux, Marvin E. "Marketing Continuing Education: A Study of Price Strategies," Occasional Papers in Continuing Education. Vancouver: Centre for Continuing Education, University of British Columbia, March 1976, page 1.)

As discussed below, colleges and universities explain, justify, or rationalize their continuing education programs in terms of their institutional philosophies. However, except when specific courses or programs are scrutinized,

as by an accreditation team, such explanation is couched in the most general terms, broadly invoking community service, lifelong learning, and other such inclusive concepts. Nonetheless, philosophic considerations enter directly into continuing education decision-making. Often considered closely, equally with marketing and academic factors, is whether a particular activity is consistent with or compatible with the philosophy of the institution, its stated goals and mission, especially in traditional schools.

Continuing Education Courses.

Many factors go into the decision to offer a course through continuing education, given the course's philosophic consistency or compatibility with the institution. Moreover, the processes of initiation and inception vary.

Sometimes the continuing education staff is aware of the need and marketability of a course, and develops it and identifies faculty.

Sometimes a faculty member with special knowledge and talent approaches the office.

Sometimes the office is approached by an outside individual who is a specialist in a field and is aware of need and marketability.

Sometimes the approach is made by a group or an organization in need of an educational program.

Reports from such organizations as the National University Extension Association, the Association for Continuing Higher Education, and the Adult Education Association of the U.S.A. show that this pattern is common to continuing education operations in colleges and universities throughout the United States and Canada. That is, the sources of ideas for continuing education are many and varied.

Once the idea is introduced, then certain questions are raised:

Who are the potential clientele? What do they need? Can they be reached? Does the office have, can it obtain suitable mailing lists and access to the best information outlets? What is the enrollment potential? Has the market been depleted? Is the course being offered free of charge by school district adult schools or community colleges?

How long must the course be (remembering that, as Lamoureux found, course length is a negative factor in student recruitment)? How much credit may then be sought and granted? Should the course be offered for credit or not-for-credit?

What are the cost factors: promotion, other overhead, faculty? Given length, credit, costs, clientele, competition, what would be the highest marketable fee?[3]

Given all of the above, and assuming all necessary preparatory steps are taken in time and in good order, is it likely the course will secure sufficient enrollment?

If all concerned have reason to anticipate success, then the course is attempted. The real measure of whether the information was sufficient and judgments of probability were accurate occurs when the decision is made, based upon actual enrollment, whether the course is "go" or "no go."

Potentialities and Options.

Many continuing education operations have solid records of achievement under existing restrictive institutional constraints and concomitant policy. Assuming that they will continue to be alert to new frontiers, innovative and selective in programming, efficient in operation, industrious, diligent,

and economical, they should continue at steady state, even to show a modicum of growth despite limits of jurisdiction, operation and budget.

That may be a traditional institution's preferred option.

On the other hand, were a continuing education director to be asked to increase continuing education productivity markedly, that could be done only if some combination of change options were to be exercised.

For the market is penetrable, but only if the institution is willing to allow use of contractors and/or to budget for program specialists, or "program planners."[4] Moreover, the institutions would have to permit program specialists to negotiate, within specified parameters, with individual or corporate contractors, agreements that are frankly entrepreneurial. Such agreements normally utilize any of a variety of sliding scales based upon expenses, enrollment, and income. In traditional institutions, continuing education offices are discouraged from entering into such agreements on the grounds that their apparent commercialization places the academic quality of the courses or programs in question. However, experience is quite different. The most successful teachers in continuing education, those with national reputations and followings, possess marketing capability of their own, are quite sophisticated about such matters, and command respectable fees.

Where, then, does primary substantial continuing education growth potential lie? All or most of the evidence including trends among the most successful "non-traditional" institutions suggest growth will continue to be in degree programs for adults. The one category of educational commodity still in demand among adults is the degree from an accredited college or university. Also apparently true is that most institutions' natural constituency of adults who have not earned their degrees remains largely unserved and their

educational needs unmet. As things stand now, there is no place in the traditional institution's scheme for the adult who wishes to earn a bachelor's degree in the evening or on weekends, part-time.

Options.

Thus, the traditional institution has certain options to weigh if it chooses to expand its continuing education operation.

Authorize the continuing education office to offer undergraduate (and, perhaps, graduate) degree programs in "Liberal Studies," or "General Studies," or some title which is distinct from but equal in status to the degree granted by the college or colleges of the institution. (It may be advisable if not essential to establish the office as a School or College of Continuing Education in order to lend greater credibility to the program.[5])

Allow the office to establish admissions criteria and registration procedures which do not discriminate against part-time students in terms of "time, geographic, or economic constraints."[6]

Authorize means to achieve the above; this may be achieved by budgetary and staffing increases or through the use of a contractor or contractors, the latter being the economical route.[7]

Continuing Education: Where It Stands

Educational literature is filled with discussions of the significance, scope, and potential for the movement to "lifelong schooling." Their message is that markets exist for continuing education among many classes of adults.

But this does not imply a clear field for any institution, that it need only present itself and adult students will come flocking to it. On the contrary, the market is intensely competitive. Most major communities are replete with both public and private colleges of great competency and

financial resources. In Los Angeles, for example, those include UCLA Extension, the largest operation of its kind in the world, which enrolls about 120,000 students a year; the extension divisions of the California State Universities and Colleges; the Consortium of the CSUC System, known as the "1,000 Mile Campus"; the Los Angeles Community College System and other community colleges, particularly formidable deliverers of adult and continuing education because they are tax supported and offer courses virtually free of charge; and private colleges and universities, both accredited and non-accredited, which offer numerous non-traditional and traditional degree and credit programs at various sites.[8] In addition, adult divisions of local school districts conduct extensive programs both day and evening. Like the community colleges, they have been offering courses virtually free of charge. (Of course, all this appears to be subject to major change in the wake of the passage in California of Proposition 13.) Proprietary schools in real estate, medical assisting, paralegal, etc. and professional organizations' educational divisions round out the types of providers.[9]

Many private institutions, some very large, others quite small, have seen fit to move vigorously into the field of off-campus and non-traditional education for adults. Some have done so almost purely out of the institution's financial need; others almost purely to meet community need because of highly specialized competency and for public relations.[10] All, however, explain if they do so at all or are pressed for a statement, in terms of meeting need and providing community service, even in those instances where programs are offered 3,000 miles from the home campus in such large and locally well-served metropolitan areas as Boston and Los Angeles. Nonetheless, and despite the implied skepticism regarding their rationale, need and demand for the programs exist. Further,

the consensus is that colleges and universities must meet the need and demand of adults for degrees, teacher "hurdle" courses, and continuing education for professionals, delivered in modes that are suited to where the adults are, both physically and psychologically. If they do not, others will. The others--educational entrepreneurs--are doing so already. Moreover, in the face of closings of traditional colleges, non-traditional colleges and universities are being established, flourishing, being admitted to candidacy and being accredited by regional accrediting associations.[11]

Providers and Commentary.

Contractors. Those institutions which have succeeded in their off-campus and non-traditional programs have done so because they have been willing to engage in carefully designed, vigorous, sometimes expensive promotion. Most have retained the services of outside contractors for one or more of the following services: market survey, market development, publicity, program development, site selection and arrangements, staff selection and retention, program delivery, billing and collection of fees, and financing. For a small institution with limited personnel and financial resources, the necessity for outside assistance adequately to perform some or all of these functions is obvious.

Operationally, outside contractors introduce a low-risk or no-risk factor. Generally, the arrangement is that, at no monetary cost to the institution, they perform designated functions and retain or are paid a substantial share of the income from the programs after certain minima go to the institution.

Outside contractors customarily offer previously developed and prepackaged educational programs in non-traditional modes. They may emphasize much independent study, "the weekend college" or other intensive sessions, forms of programmed instruction, and heavy reliance on evaluation, for credit toward

of prior learning degrees, etc.[12]

Throughout the United States with a few exceptions, the reasons for accredited institutions' turning to contractors for program development and staffing--rather than solely for promotional and recruitment functions--is rather uniform. Usually it occurs because of the inertia and/or active resistance the institutions encounter on their campuses. Some administrators and faculty are unable to adapt to new modes of instruction and new clientele. Others are unwilling to receive the new wave of adult students and actively resist institutional adaptation to them. The resistance takes many forms and is couched in several rationalizations.

The rationale most often invoked involves the philosophy and mission of the institution; uniformity, hence fairness, of standards of admission; tradition and institutional image; more subtly, perhaps, but no less powerfully, territoriality, or "turf"; quality control; fiscal control; and an attitude of scorn and derision toward those institutions and programs which have employed contractors, advertising agencies, and non-traditional programming to respond to the educational needs and demands of adults.

So resistant institutions impose rigid admissions standards, deadlines, and procedures; tedious and archaic registration requiring personal presence and queuing; low priority in registration sequence; lack of evening, Saturday, or concentrated classes; restriction of the offerings and authority of the continuing education segment of the institution, etc.

Philosophy and Attitude.

Nonetheless, within most institutional philosophy statements of community service lies the philosophic kernel which allows the establishment of continuing education divisions. Moreover, all of the national trends indicate

that the increase in postsecondary education enrollment is mainly among adults; of those, most are in the 25-34 age group who study on a part-time basis. Part-time students now comprise 62.0 percent of the total number of participants in postsecondary education, of whom a slight majority are women.

But traditional emphasis places undergraduate and, in many cases, even graduate education mainly out of the reach of the adults, with very few exceptions. As mentioned earlier, evidence for this may be found in the imposition of ordinary standards of admission and the sparsity of undergraduate courses in the evening.[13]

A Concluding Issue.

The central question thus at issue in the traditional institution is whether its continuing education office's programmatic scope should remain severely limited. Or should its continuing education operation be granted greater latitude to increase activity in ways designed to reach new (adult) student clientele, thereby to expand the educational scope of the institution, to broaden its image of service, potentially to alter its student body makeup, and even to increase the institution's income.

If the former option is favored, no action except possible reaffirmation of the position would be required: the status quo ante does not often need to be justified.

On the other hand, if the latter option is favored, then an assurance is in order, and a course of supportive actions called for.

The basic assurance is that a traditional institution which authorizes the entry of its continuing education office into the undergraduate

education of adults, undertaken in large measure via non-traditional modes, does not contradict its prior emphasis on the undergraduate education of men and women in the formative years along traditional lines.

But the action does--or should--imply a new attitude of equality of purpose, an attitude which rejects the "notion that adult education is something inherently inferior...and that the 'real' business of higher education remains...the training of the young."[14] This attitude should not be lightly taken, but should be explored fully, for it implies a readiness to accept the concomitant development of different admissions standards; new approaches to evaluation of prior record and experience; a student body with a new visage, needs, problems, and preoccupations; new teaching methods; perhaps less cavalier handling of the basis for student evaluation; and the presence in courses of mature adults with experiences equal to those of the professors, less inclined perhaps to stand in awe of the professorial role or unquestioningly of administrative prerogatives.

NOTES

[1]Exigency leads to exceptions. In order to bolster programs in certain instances, colleges have sought or authorized registration of continuing education students in some under-enrolled, marginal courses.

[2]Reference is mainly to adult students, those outside the traditional 18-22 age range. The decision's rationale is that the presence of continuing education students in regular classes would somehow violate the institution's pledge of quality instruction to students who have been duly admitted to it. Innovators would question whether judgment based upon an adult's high school transcript of a decade or more ago coupled with strict adherence to early deadlines is appropriate.

National studies have shown that the main deterrent to adult reentry is the red tape of admissions and registration. Experience shows that, rather than detracting from the quality of instruction, adult students add an enriching dimension to classes through modeling behavior (interest, conscientiousness) and the wisdom and experience of their years.

[3]Lamoureux's description of UBC's program planning paradigm shows that it essentially parallels prevailing practice. Lamoureux defines UBC's pricing strategy in terms of "price threshold theory"; that is, without doing research, they generally price their courses at the "fair" or "acceptable" level, which is an actual or perceived consumer-determined level somewhere between the high and low bounds, or thresholds (p. 11). We are tentatively persuaded that competition is the most important factor in pricing. Otherwise, we would hold with Suleiman that a most frequent error made by universities is underpricing their programs. "If I were to make one sweeping recommendation to universities it would be to increase the price of their programs..." (Suleiman, Anver S., quoted in an announcement from the Bureau of Business and Technology on "Developing and Marketing Successful Seminars and Conferences, 1977-78.". Suleiman is editor of Dean and Director.)

[4]Program specialists, or program planners, devote all their time and energy to planning and marketing continuing education in specific fields. They are in the $12,000-25,000/year salary range and require space, support personnel, and promotional budgets.

[5]This is consistent with the Recommendations on Credentialing Educational Accomplishments of the Task Force on Educational Credit and Credentials of the American Council on Education (1978). For example, Recommendation Eight reads in part that "Postsecondary education institutions should develop alternative programs that...permit students to demonstrate accomplishment without reference to time-bound and campus-bound instruction and learning." (page 16).

[6]Broschart, James R. Lifelong Learning in the Nation's Third Century. Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education & Welfare, 1977; page 23. Broschart particularly criticizes institutions whose "Part-time students are especially prey to a variety of institutional regulations, such as the strict controls typically exerted over the time and place for registration and the harsh dollar penalties for not meetin those requirements" (page 22).